and legal experts to advise the Government during its continuing negotiations with the WTO?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) In the Commerce Minister's address to the Geneva Ministerial Conference. India's concerns relating to the implementation of the Uruguay Round Agreements, and the imbalances and asymmetries in these Agreements, have been enumerated. India will continue to take these issues up vigorously as part of the process to be taken up by the General Council later this year to discuss and deliberate on issues raised by Member countries, with a view to making specific recommendations to the third session of the Ministerial Conference, scheduled in late 1999.

(b) and (c) Items 13 & 14 of list I of schedule 7 of the Constitution gives Govt. of India exclusive right to (a) participate in international conferences, associations and other bodies and to implement decisions made threat and (b) entering into treaties and agreements with foreign countries and implementing such treaties, agreements and conventions. Article 73 of the Constitution extends the executive power of the Union to the exercise of such rights, authority and jurisdiction as are exercisable by virtue of any treaty or agreement. Article 253 indicates that Parliament has overriding powers to make any law for the whole or any part of the territory of India for implementing any treaty, agreement or convention with any other country or countries or decisions taken at any international conference, association or body. Thus, there is no constitutional requirement to consult the State Governments in such matters.

However, Govt. of India's decision process involves consultations with all concerned groups. There are already in existence consulative groups on major issues like. Environment, Trade in services, Trade in Goods and Trade Facilitation. These working groups comprise of representatives of the concerned administrative Ministry/ Departments, APEX Chambers of Commerce, noted academicians and technologists of repute. The Government also seeks the views and assistance of State Governments from time to time.

Price Stabalisation Fund for Rubber Procurement

1219. SHRI J. CHITHARANJAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state whether Government propose to create a price stablisation fund to facilitate the creation of a buffer stock of natural rubber and procurement operation?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): No, Sir. However, STC was asked to procure 10,000 MTs of Natural Rubber in August, 1997 and again in May, '98 procurement of an additional quantity of 20,000 MTs has been ordered, to arrest the decline in rubber prices.

Fall in Prices of Raw Rubber/Latex

1220. SHRI J. CHITHARANJAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the steep fall in prices of raw rubber and latex;

(b) what steps Government had taken to ensure a remunerative price for rubber and latex;

(c) whether Government should ban the import of used tyres and polyurethane, completely; and

(d) whether Government will declare a remunerative price for natural rubber and direct the STC to purchase 50,000 tonnes of raw rubber at that price rate and to export the same?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. In order to sustain the market for natural rubber in India.

the Government had ordered a market intervention operation for procurement of 10,000 MT of natural rubber during 1997 by STC. This procurement has been further extended in May, 1998 to an additional quantity of 20,000 MT.

(c) In order to discourage indiscriminate import of used tyres, a minimum C.I.F. value restriction has been imposed on import of used tyres by the Government of India.

As Polyurethane is a material of versatile properties and also the quantity of polyurethane being imported is not substantial enough to pose a threat to rubber/latex, total ban on its import is not desirable and would affect the competitive advantage of the domestic foam industry.

(d) For providing a remunerative price to the rubber growers, the Ministry of Finance has already undertaken a study into the cost of production of Natural Rubber with a view to revising the Benchmark Price for rubber. The STC, who have been directed in May, 1998 to procure 20,000 MT of Natural Rubber at the prevailing market price not exceeding Rs. 34/per kg., have been directed to export the procured rubber and/or sell it only to the Advance Licence Holders.

Poor Tobacco Crop

1221. SHRI YERRA NARAYANASWAMY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Tobacco Board has taken cognizance of the poor tobacco crop in 1997-98 season;

(b) if so, what steps the Tobacco Board has taken to assist the tobacco farmers of Andhra Pradesh;

(c) whether any financial assistance has been given directly by the Tobacco Board to farmers; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) and (b) Tobacco Board had authorised a crop size 110 Million. Kgs. of FCV tobacco in Andhra Pradesh for the year 1997-98 against which the estimated production is 118 Million Kgs. Due to unseasonal and incessent rains during Nov./Dec. 97 there was some damage caused to the standing tobacco crop & tobacco curing barns. Further, some tobacco crop was also affected by the brown spot disease. The farmers were assisted by the Board in securing additional crop loans for rejuvenation of their damaged crops and repair of the barns. A loan subsidy by the Tobacco Board to the extent of Rs. 3.90 crores was approved by the Government for giving assistance to the affected SC/ST, small & marginal farmers to compensate the losses sustained. Tobacco Board has also made available pesticides on credit to the farmers for control of the disease at its auction platforms.

(a) and (d) Direct financial assistance was not provided to the farmers.The financial assistance by way of the Rs. 3.9 crores loan subsidy was extended through banking channels. Details of assistance availed by the farmers are:—

(Rs. in cores)

Category of farmers	No. of farmers	Financial Assistance
Small Farmers	7919	1.36
Marginal Farmers	2676	0.53
SC/ST Farmers	383	0.10
TOTAL	10.978	1.99

Registration of Tobacco Farmers

1222. SHRI YERRA NARAYANASWAMY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Tobacco Board does not facilitate registration